CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.824
20 May 1999

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FOURTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 20 May 1999, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. Nguyen Quy Binh (Viet Nam)

GE.99-61774 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 824th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I have on my list of speakers for today the representative of the United States of America. I give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, Ambassador Robert Grey.

Mr. GREY (United States of America): Mr. President, this is the first time I have spoken since you assumed your current duties, and I would like to congratulate you on the energy and imagination you have shown in presiding over the work of the Conference. I regret that overall circumstances have not favoured your efforts, and in doing so I am sure I speak for many others. In any case, I assure you of my delegation's full cooperation as you complete your term of service.

Today, on behalf of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, I would like to introduce a proposal on the Conference's work programme and ask that it be circulated as an official document. The proposal preserves many elements of the work programme proposal I tabled on 2 February, at a time when I was seated where you are sitting now. But in all frankness, Mr. President, I greatly prefer my own chair and believe that by now, you fully understand why.

The new proposal differs from the old one in two important ways. First, the new proposal starts with a draft declaration that the President would make on the day the Conference proceeds to adopt the decision, in order to clarify and explain the presidency's plans for intensive consultations on topics related to nuclear disarmament. This draft declaration resembles the Presidential statement delivered on 26 March 1998 (CD/1500), but the new wording incorporates a number of enhancements we hope will be helpful.

The sponsors are proposing these clarifications because we believe the presidency's consultations this year should not be limited to procedural factors. To the contrary, we are seeking to foster informal dialogue on substantive endeavours leading toward nuclear disarmament. To us the new text seems quite clear about that, but others might be able to advance suggestions that may serve to reinforce that point.

The second major improvement appears in paragraph 2 of the draft decision we propose. According to that paragraph, the Conference would decide to re-establish, under item 1 of the agenda, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", the Ad Hoc Committee to negotiate, on the basis of the report of the Special Coordinator (CD/1299) and the mandate contained therein, a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Up to this point, the wording is the same as in the Conference's decision of 11 August 1998 contained in CD/1547, as well as in operative paragraph 1 of United Nations General Assembly resolution 53/77 I - which was adopted without a vote last 4 December. But in the next sentence of its

(Mr. Grey, United States)

decision, the Conference would instruct the Ad Hoc Committee to commence negotiations immediately with a view to their early conclusion, and then go on to decide that the Ad Hoc Committee shall meet in successive sessions of the Conference until its work is completed, without the need for annual reauthorization.

In considering our proposal, it is important to bear in mind the clear desire of the international community that negotiations be concluded at an early date, as evident from the General Assembly resolution adopted without a vote last fall. But given the subject's well-known complexities, and because of the limited time left in this year's session, it is impossible to believe that negotiations will be concluded before the Conference adjourns in September. Work on the treaty will have to continue during next year's session of the Conference, and many observers predict that further negotiations will be required in one or more years that follow.

The sponsors of the proposal cannot believe the international community intends for negotiations to prohibit the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices to proceed in fits and starts. It would be irresponsible for the Conference to make limited progress this year, then refrain from returning to the task promptly and energetically when it reconvenes in January.

Midway through this year's session, we are confronted with a salient and disturbing fact: members of the Conference have not yet heeded the General Assembly's clear and uncontested call for prompt resumption of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. The sponsors strongly believe the Conference must take affirmative measures to prevent further delay at the beginning of next year's session for reasons unrelated to the merits of the treaty we have all agreed to negotiate.

In a procedural sense, the wording of our proposal takes account of an important idea that was suggested in 1998 by the distinguished Ambassador of Chile, in his capacity as Special Coordinator for improved and effective functioning of the Conference. At that time, Ambassador Illanes proposed that subordinate bodies should continue in being until their purposes have been fulfilled. Members of the Conference could not reach agreement on that as a general principle; but in view of the General Assembly resolution, the sponsors believe it should certainly apply to work of the FMCT Ad Hoc Committee.

In conclusion, the sponsors commend the proposal to members and ask them to give it active study and reflection. We hope the proposal will soon be the basis for general agreement, so the Conference can proceed with its paramount task: negotiating multilateral arms control and disarmament agreements for which consensus exists, while taking appropriate account of the capabilities, strengths, and experience of the Conference in conducting such negotiations and bringing them to a successful conclusion.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the United States of America for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. That concludes the list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? I give the floor to the representative of France.

Mr. DAHAN (France) (translated from French): Mr. President, as my delegation is speaking for the first time under your guidance, I wished to take the opportunity thus offered to me to convey to you our warmest congratulations on the occasion of your accession to the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament. You can count on the full support of the French delegation in leading our work.

Having reached the mid-point of the work of its 1999 session, the Conference on Disarmament has still not been able to adopt its programme of work and thus begin substantive negotiations on disarmament, which constitute its essential purpose.

I wished to speak today to support the proposed programme of work which has just been introduced to you by Ambassador Grey on behalf of the United States, the United Kingdom and France. The French delegation played an active part in the drafting of this proposal. The content of the draft which has just been communicated to you consists of elements which are familiar to the members of this Conference. It bears the stamp of continuity, pragmatism and openness. It draws to a great extent on the proposals made by the successive Presidents since the beginning of our work in January 1999. At the same time, it features two innovations.

As the first innovation, the draft is a point-by-point response to the requests for clarification made in the G21, inter alia, but also elsewhere, concerning the terms of reference for a mechanism for enhanced Presidential consultations on nuclear disarmament. This strengthened machinery is based on the following principles: transparency, regular reporting, open-ended consultations, establishment of an exchange of information and views.

As the second innovation, the proposal tries to place the reconstitution of the Ad Hoc Committee on the "cut-off" in a longer-term framework. It thus provides for the re-establishment of this Committee throughout successive negotiating sessions until the treaty is completed. The purpose of this formula is to affirm the political priority attached to the rapid initiation and the conclusion of the negotiations on the "cut-off" and to avoid the mistakes of the past.

I should like to recall that the Ambassador of Chile, as Special Coordinator on improvement of the functioning of the Conference on Disarmament, had proposed a formula of this type in 1998. My delegation supports that principle, though the arrangements for its application might be improved.

The French delegation's priorities are, I think, well known in this forum. Allow me to add that the proposal which has been presented to you today was drawn up in a spirit of compromise and hence only imperfectly meets

(Mr. Dahan, France)

the concerns of my delegation. I wished to say in that regard that France considers the establishment of the ad hoc committee on prevention of an arms race in outer space to be an important objective of our proceedings. But in this spirit of compromise, the French delegation will actively support the efforts of a special coordinator.

My delegation hopes that the spirit of compromise emanating from the proposed programme of work submitted today to the Conference on Disarmament will receive wide support. It is high time to get down to work. In one of the chapters of his work written in 1934 entitled Clochemerle, Gabriel Chevallier very aptly described the proceedings of the Conference on Disarmament between the two wars. One of his characters, the Prime Minister of a European country who was annoyed at not having been able to present his plan for disarmament, says: "Disarmament can wait. It has been waiting for 50,000 years." Now, more than half a century later, let us strive together to ensure that this sombre prediction is not borne out.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of France for his statement and for the kind words to the Chair. I give the floor to the representative of Romania.

Mr. GRECU (Romania): My delegation fully supports the proposal just made by the distinguished Ambassador of the United States. We believe that if approved, this proposal could contribute to the launching of the substantive work of the Conference. The Romanian delegation would like to join in co-sponsoring this proposal.

Mr. MAIMESKUL (Ukraine): I will be very brief. I have asked for the floor to express the support of the Ukrainian delegation for the draft programme of work presented by Ambassador Grey of the United States of America.

Ms. BURTT (Australia): Since my delegation is speaking for the first time under your presidency, Sir, I would also just like to take the opportunity to congratulate you on your accession to the presidency and assure you of my delegation's full support for the short time you have remaining.

I shall be very brief as well. I would just like to express my delegation's support for the proposal just presented by Ambassador Grey of the United States on behalf of the United States, the United Kingdom and France. We believe it contains some very valuable additional elements and will therefore constitute a very useful contribution to our current efforts to establish a work programme for the Conference. Therefore, we would simply urge all delegations to give it serious consideration in the course of our deliberations.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Australia for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. ORLINSKI (Poland): Since this is the first time I take the floor under your guidance, Mr. President, I congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the CD and the work you have done so far. To be brief, I wish to express the support of my delegation for the proposal presented by Ambassador Grey. My delegation thinks that in the spirit of compromise, this proposal will contribute to the attainment of early consensus on the programme of work of the Conference. We do agree that the Conference must take affirmative measures to prevent further delay at the beginning of next year's session for reasons unrelated to the merits of the treaty we have already agreed to negotiate.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Poland for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. PETÓCZ (Slovakia): I would just like to express the support of my delegation for the proposal made by Ambassador Grey.

Mr. KESKINTEPE (Turkey): I have requested the floor this morning to express our support for the proposal tabled by the distinguished Ambassador of the United States on behalf of the United States, the United Kingdom and France. My delegation has carefully studied the proposal. In our view, the proposal and the new elements contained therein deserve the CD's best attention, and we also hope that it would lead the Conference to reach a compromise on the programme of work for 1999 at the earliest.

Mr. PIPERKOV (Bulgaria): On behalf of the Bulgarian delegation I would also like to join with those delegations who have supported the proposal of the three countries. We think that this proposal is a very good compromise and a very good basis for the work of our Conference.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Bulgaria. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? That concludes the speakers for today.

Since this nearly brings to an end the term of my presidency, I should like to add a few closing remarks. My predecessors and I have concentrated all our efforts on the programme of work. You are aware that two points have prevented agreement on the programme of work so far, namely the appropriate mechanisms for dealing with nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Despite the difficulties and the differences remaining among the groups, there are serious efforts from every corner to try to move toward agreement and enable the Conference to start its substantive work. From the Chair's point of view, I would like to say that those efforts should continue. Every proposal is welcome, and today we have had one. We would wish to see the consultations continue in an intensive way.

Before adjourning the meeting, I should like to thank you all for the cooperation and support you have extended to me during my presidency. There only remains for me to wish my successor in this function,

(The President)

Ambassador Mohamed Dembri of Algeria, all the best in his endeavours and assure him of my readiness to cooperate with him. I would also like to express my thanks to the secretariat, Mr. Petrovsky, Mr. Bensmail and the staff and the interpreters for the support given and without whom we could not have functioned in the way we have. Once again, I thank you very much for the kind assistance and cooperation.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 27 May at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.